Working Paper No. 30, 2020

Pandemic Avant-Garde

Urban Coexistence in Mário de Andrade's *Pauliceia Desvairada* (1922) after the Spanish Flu

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Mecila: Working Paper Series

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Executive Editors: Sérgio Costa, Lateinamerika-Institut, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

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Editing/Production: Gesine Müller, Peter W. Schulze, Joaquim Toledo Jr., Paul Talcott

This working paper series is produced as part of the activities of the Maria Sibylla Merian International Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences Conviviality-Inequality in Latin America (Mecila) funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

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Citation: Klengel, Susanne (2020): “Pandemic Avant-Garde: Urban Coexistence in Mário de Andrade’s *Pauliceia Desvairada* (1922) after the Spanish Flu”, *Mecila Working Paper Series*, No. 30, São Paulo: The Maria Sibylla Merian International Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences Conviviality-Inequality in Latin America, http://dx.doi.org/10.46877/klengel.2020.30.

Pandemic Avant-Garde: Urban Coexistence in Mário de Andrade's *Pauliceia Desvairada* (1922) after the Spanish Flu

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Abstract

The radical aesthetic of the historical avant-garde movements has often been explained as a reaction to the catastrophic experience of the First World War and a denouncement of the bourgeoisie's responsibility for its horrors. This article explores a blind spot in these familiar interpretations of the international avant-garde. Not only the violence of the World War but also the experience of a worldwide deadly pandemic, the Spanish flu, have moulded the literary and artistic production of the 1920s. In this paper, I explore this hypothesis through the example of Mário de Andrade's famous book of poetry *Pauliceia desvairada* (1922), which I reinterpret in the light of historical studies on the Spanish flu in São Paulo. An in-depth examination of all parts of this important early opus of the Brazilian Modernism shows that Mário de Andrade's poetic images of urban coexistence simultaneously aim at a radical renewal of language and at a melancholic coming to terms with a traumatic pandemic past.

Keywords: Spanish flu | avant-garde | Mário de Andrade | *Pauliceia Desvairada*

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1. Introduction[1]

At the beginning of April 2020, a series of aerial photos were flashed around the world: from the high perspective of a drone, they showed countless closely dug burial sites in the reddish soil of the huge Vila Formosa cemetery in São Paulo. The photographs of the open graves gave a foreboding of what was to come with the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil. Previously, similarly evocative pictures had been seen from Bergamo in Italy, where in mid-March military lorries were used to remove those who had died in the last few days and hours. Images that, amidst the flood of media bytes, seem to refer for a moment to the unimaginable – to death, which in a very short time gathered such rich harvests that public administration could no longer cope with the dynamics of death and burial. Even in the critical debates about the social dangers of modern biopolitics (based on the ideas of Michel Foucault), a feeling of insecurity was palpable, and the need for precise arguments in view of the pandemic evident.[2]

The military lorries, driving close behind each other, and the open graves evoke the countless dead borne in coffins every day by helpers, pallbearers, and gravediggers. The pictures are so frightening because they not only stand for the ongoing catastrophe of the deadly viral disease and the overwhelming demands made on the state and society but also make clear that similar and even more distressing images exist elsewhere, and that they will soon fade or fail altogether to stick in memory. Shock, suppression, and forgetting are closely interwoven.

The Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro is well known as a master in suppressing and denying such images and circumstances. On 20 April 2020, when asked by a journalist about the steep rise in the number of deaths in Brazil, he irritably replied: “I’m not a gravedigger, ok?”. In his cynicism, Bolsonaro called up the image of a professional group that is working non-stop at a time of a deadly epidemic, carrying out its work anonymously and usually without comment. The profession of pallbearers and “gravediggers”, or cemetery workers and undertakers, will play an important role in the

1 My thanks to Jonathan Uhlaner for his careful and sensitive translation.

2 The debate commenced with the public responses to Giorgio Agamben’s article “L’invenzione di un’epidemia”, which appeared for the first time on 26 February 2020 and was re-published shortly thereafter, together with a text excerpt by Foucault from *Surveiller et punir* and critical comments on the article, in the *European Journal of Psychoanalysis* under the title “Coronavirus and Philosophers: M. Foucault, G. Agamben, J.L. Nancy, R. Esposito, S. Benvenuto, D. Dwivedi, S. Mohan, R. Ronchi, M. de Carolis” (Benvenuto 2020).

following remarks, which lead me from the observations of 2020 back to the period around 1920.[3]

2. Fear and Forgetting in Extreme Times

Research on the so-called "Spanish flu",[4] the world's most serious pandemic to date, which raged in 1918 and 1919, repeatedly emphasizes how swiftly the epidemic was forgotten once it subsided, even though the death toll of the tremendous number of victims was greater than that of the First World War. Thus, in her highly acclaimed book *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World*, the British author Laura Spinney speaks of

> […] our collective forgetting of the greatest massacre of the twentieth century. The Spanish flu infected one in three people on earth, or 500 million human beings. Between the first case recorded on 4 March 1918, and the last sometime in March 1920, it killed 50-100 million people, or between 2.5 and 5 per cent of the global population – a range that reflects the uncertainty that still surrounds it (Spinney 2017: 4).

For a long time, historiography too treated the pandemic only as a footnote (Spinney 2017: 3-9). Not until the late 1980s did historical research on this event and similar topics intensify, triggered by the spread of HIV and new pandemic influenza outbreaks (Spinney 2017: 6; Philips and Kilingray 2003b: 18-21).[5] The same applies to research in Brazil, where scholars have presented more and more studies on different regions and places where the Spanish flu was rampant.[6]

Recently the publication of Ruy Castro's *Metrópole à beira-mar: O Rio moderno dos anos 20* (2019), a book about the 1920s in Rio Janeiro, has caused a stir. It includes an

3 A report on the gravediggers (*coveiros*) in São Paulo by Tahiane Stochero on May 12, 2020 relates: "They don't like to be called gravediggers – they prefer buriers. They are the professionals hired by the City of São Paulo, civil servants who bury the dead in the municipal public cemeteries. Despite having entered the position by public tender, they feel devalued by the profession they have chosen, especially in times of a coronavirus pandemic, which has left more than 3,700 dead in the state and 11,000 in the country" (Stochero 2020, author's translation).

4 The term "Spanish flu" indicates not the origin of the pandemic but rather its first systematic description and registration by Spanish authorities. Its origin is now believed to have been in the United States and the spread of the virus was probably caused by troop movements in the First World War. Cf. Echeverri 2003: 173; Porras-Gallo and Davis 2014: 7; Spinney 2017: 37-45, 77.

5 The anthology edited by Philips and Kilingray goes back to the first international conference on Spanish flu in Cape Town in 1998.

6 Cf., e.g., "As dimensões político-sociais de uma epidemia: a paulicéia desvairada pela gripe espanhola" by Christiane Maria Cruz de Souza, a detailed review of Cláudio Bertolli Filho's *A gripe espanhola em São Paulo* (2003) which presents a good survey of the historical research, starting with master's theses in the 1980s (Souza 2005: 573, footnote 2).

introductory chapter on the World War and the Spanish flu, which claimed a particularly large number of victims in the Brazilian capital (Castro 2019: 11-29). The author describes how, after months of anxious self-isolation and daily confrontation with illness and death, the inhabitants of the city ecstatically celebrated Carnival at the sudden end of the epidemic in early 1919, before the catastrophe then swiftly slipped into oblivion.[7] The historian Cláudio Bertolli Filho, by contrast, describes a similar scenario in his study on the epidemic in São Paulo with a more nuanced view of its latent aftermath:

> […] a influenza epidêmica foi, imediatamente após sua ocorrencia, abolida da memória paulistana oficial, integrando-se marginalmente ao discurso médico e administrativo como uma experiência de pouca importância dentro de uma conjuntura progressista. […] Apesar de eliminada do discurso médico-administrativo e do interesse dos pesquisadores a contemporâneos, na sua versão paulistana, *ficou para sempre gravada na memória e também no corpo* de todos aqueles que vivenciaram o grande flagelo (Bertolli Filho 2003: 355 and 360, author's emphasis).

Based on the carefully researched and well-observed socio-historical studies by Bertolli Filho and Liane Maria Bertucci about the flu in São Paulo,[8] the following reflections will pursue the conjecture that traces of the pandemic must also be present in the literary

7 In his further remarks, Castro does not return to the flu, a circumstance which either confirms the hypothesis of historical repression or, conversely, shows that he became aware of the relevance of the historical event only when he came to write the preface. Here I should mention the important cultural-historical study by Nicolau Sevcenko, *Orfeu extático na metrópole: São Paulo, sociedade e cultura nos frementes anos 20* (1992), which also sees the Carnival in São Paulo in 1919 as a sign of the psychological overcoming of the epidemic and other plagues, though it considers the possible consequences of the flu as completely secondary to the influence of coming to grips with the effects of the First World War (cf. also footnote 10).

8 Both studies refer extensively to historical documents of the public administration and the press and to memoirs, etc. Particularly relevant is the first general overview of the epidemic in Brazil, complete with statistical data and reports, from the Serviço Sanitário do Estado de São Paulo (Meyer and Teixeira 1920). In his preliminary remarks, Arthur Neiva, Director of the Health Service, recalls the pandemic as a collective experience of unimaginable horror: "O historiador que, no futuro, procurar descrever as principaes epidemias que assolaram o Brazil, com muita difficuldade poderá fazer idéa da formidavel calamidade que foi a grippe epidemica. Já se sabe hoje que a 'grippe hespanhola' constituiu a major epidemia conhecida na Historia. Fez a volta ao planeta; flagellou desde os centros mais povoados aos escassos grupos de homens occupados na faina de pescarias polar. Nosso paiz foi por ella percorrido do littoral aos sertões; propagou-se pelas mais remotas plagas, indo alcançar as tribus dos carajás ás margens do Araguaya, não poupando os homens encontrados em regiões inda as mais remotas, como as palmilhadas pela comitiva do grande Rondon" (Meyer and Teixeira 1920: iii). The report highlights the more successful containment of the flu in São Paulo than in Rio de Janeiro, though Bertolli Filho and Bertucci are critical of the scope of these statements.

production of those years which have hitherto hardly been noticed.[9] For, even amidst all the upheaval of social modernisation and new forms in literature, poetry, and art, the drama of the deadly pandemic at the beginning of the 1920s was certainly not simply forgotten. An eye for such traces seems nevertheless to have been clouded by research that focuses primarily on the events of the World War and the October Revolution of 1917 to explain the radical aesthetic positions of poets and artists rather than on the coming to terms with the traumatic experience of a deadly epidemic.[10] This *blind spot* in the research is all the more astonishing in the case of regions that did not directly take part in the war or were not affected by the war on their own territory, and it warrants further research.

The following is a fresh reading of Mário de Andrade's well-known collection of poems *Pauliceia desvairada*, an undisputed key work of the Brazilian and Ibero-Romance avant-garde. Using this early modernist poetry as an example, my aim is to show that the *Hespanhola* raging in 1918-1919 exercised an influence on the development of avant-garde aesthetics in São Paulo and Brazil at large that should not be underestimated.

Pauliceia desvairada was published in July 1922, five months after the spectacular Semana de Arte Moderna. It is a collection of modernist poems, including the secular oratorio "As enfibraturas do Ipiranga", which is opened by a manifesto-like introduction, the "Prefácio interessantíssimo", consisting of theoretical reflections and positionings. The date of its completion is given as 14 December 1921. It was written over the space of a year, as can be seen from another date on the title page of the first edition: "Dezembro de 1920 a Dezembro de 1921". [11] Some ambiguity exists about the temporal genesis of the poems, since no manuscripts have survived (cf. Moraes 2015: 190) and Andrade repeatedly made various statements about their origin: "Ao longo dos anos, em tantas cartas, o tempo da invenção de *Pauliceia* afirmou-se no imaginário

9 Even Bertolli Filho (2003: 359-360) names only two literary or autobiographical testimonies for the case of São Paulo: the autobiographical novel *Adolescência tropical* by Enéas Ferraz (written in Rome in 1924 and first published in French in 1931), which ends with a drastic description of the daily removal of the dead in Rio de Janeiro (Ferraz 1978: 144-147), and *Famiglia* by Orlando Magnoli (first published in 1981). He also quotes memoirs; e.g., by Paulo Duarte and Pedro Nava. Liane Bertucci likewise often refers to memoirs in her study.

10 The study *Die Kunst der Zerstörung. Gewaltphantasien und Manifestationspraktiken europäischer Avantgarden* (2001) by Hanno Ehrlicher is an interesting example of this, because it teases out the bellicose terminology of the avant-garde aesthetics of awakening against the background of the First World War. The pandemic, however, is not mentioned. Conversely, a novelty of Spinney's study on the Spanish flu is that it repeatedly cites literary and artistic allusions to the disease. Right at the start, Spinney recalls Guillaume Apollinaire's tragic death from the flu while the streets of Paris were celebrating the victory over Germany and Kaiser Wilhelm ("Guillaume") (cf. Spinney 2017: 3-4).

11 The edition used in the following is Andrade 1972a [1921]: 9-64, here abbreviated as PD. The date of 14 December 1921 can be found under the dedication (cf. also footnote 34 in this paper). The period from December 1920 to December 1921 is given on the title page of the first edition from 1922, but not in the above edition.

do autor, fixando-se em expressões definidoras de um estado de espírito arrebatador, desarrazoado, bélico […]" (Moraes 2015: 183).

Whether and to what extent the poems were spontaneous inspirations has always been a matter of interest. Andrade's correspondence with Manuel Bandeira is particularly instructive here. On 3 October 1922, Bandeira expresses friendly criticism of some of the work's stylistic idiosyncrasies but underlines his overall admiration for its radical modernity (Andrade and Bandeira 2000: 69-71). Andrade replied the same month, referring to a long and difficult period of creative latency: "Se te não disse ainda, digo-te agora a razão porque os conservei. Trata-se de uma época toda especial da minha vida. Paulicéia é a cristalização de vinte meses de dúvidas, de sofrimentos e cóleras. É uma bomba. Arrebentou! […]" (Andrade and Bandeira 2000: 72-73).[12] If we take these "twenty months of doubt" seriously, the period of genesis reaches back almost to the months of the flu and its aftermath, which according to official information began raging in São Paulo on 9 October 1918 and caused more than 5,000 deaths between 15 October and 19 December 1918.[13] Not until the end of March 1919 did the fear of a second wave of infections subside (Bertolli Filho 2003: 344-348).

In these years, Andrade was going through a phase of artistic upheaval. He searched for a new poetic language in engagement with both the Brazilian tradition and the European and international avant-garde. Yet little evidence remains of his intellectual and creative production at the time.[14] A look at his work as a music critic for *A Gazeta* from July 1918 onwards affords an idea of his everyday experiences. The young critic witnessed how the flu brought the international opera season to a standstill at the Teatro Municipal: singers, musicians and audience fell ill or stayed away out of fear, so that the theatre was finally closed.[15] Public life in the city had to be reorganized: "O medo imiscuiu-se na cidade adoentada. Nas esquinas, nas casas, bares e porões,

12 Also interesting is the renewed dialogue about *Pauliceia desvairada* in 1931, when in a letter of 16 August Andrade once again defends himself against the impression that *Pauliceia desvairada* was a spontaneous outburst ("mero desabafo"). Again he points to a long period of latency with much preparatory work and revision (Andrade and Bandeira 2000: 519-520).

13 I refer to the figures given by Bertolli Filho (2003: 91), which are based on registered deaths. The mortality rate fluctuates greatly depending on the city district and social conditions. In several places Bertolli Filho refutes the current discourse on the equalizing, democratic effect of the virus: "Apesar da permanência da ideia de ser a influenza de 1918 uma que atingiu indistintamente qualquer cidadão, a melhor averiguação dos dados permite observar que, como qualquer outra enfermedade, a gripe espanhola atingiu de forma desigual os diversos segementos da sociedade paulistana, causando um coeficiente de mortalidade bem superior entre os grupos menos favorecidos" (Bertolli Filho 2003: 95).

14 All the more important are Andrade's readings and aesthetic interests, which Telê Ancona Lopez in particular has reconstructed in detail in the Mário de Andrade Archive (cf. especially Lopez 1996, 2004 and 2013). Avancini 1994, among others, has drawn attention to Andrades's specific interest in the art and architecture of the Baroque era.

15 The reviews can also be read in E. Tadafumi Sato's master's thesis (Sato 2016) on Andrade's work as a critic. I shall return to this later.

nos jardins públicos e privados, a peste insinuava-se" (Bertolli Filho 2003: 207). A few days after the first illnesses, parks, museums, theatres, and schools were closed, businesses and factories shut down production (Bertolli Filho 2003: 214). Carnival and sports clubs postponed their meetings and events; finally, the Teatro Municipal and the conservatory closed their doors:

> O Teatro Municipal e o Conservatório Dramático e Musical, mesmo sendo entidades oficiais, foram os últimos a encerrar as atividades escolares e artísticas na cidade. […] Desde há alguns dias a plateia vinha se reduzindo drasticamente. Era a fuga silenciosa que esvaziava os lugares antes cheios de festivos paulistanos (Bertolli Filho 2003: 215).

In another place, Bertolli Filho quotes the memoirs of Paulo Duarte, who remembers how the citizens had to accustom themselves to an everyday life in which hearses with countless coffins were constantly passing through the streets:

> A Avenida Paulista, onde fui tomar o bonde, quase deserta […]. Em toda a Rua da Consolação, e isso era geral em toda a cidade, mutia pouca gente a pé, alguns automóveis, principalmente de médicos e os caminhões carregando cadaveres para os cemitérios. Esta paisagem tornou-se rotina. Já não se prestava atenção naqueles montes de caixões de defuntos, todos iguais, uns sobre os outros nos caminhões. Em S. Paulo, os mortos tiveram todos o seu caixão simples sem revestimento, não acontecendo o que se deu no Rio, onde cadaveres eram amontoados no caminhão, alguns até nus (Duarte 1976: 427).[16]

Andrade's friend the poet Oswald de Andrade also recalls similar scenes in his memoirs:

> O episódio trágico da gripe amortalha a cidade. Chamam a doença de *espanhola*. Tomou conta do mundo. Caiu também sobre São Paulo enlutando tudo. Seis semanas lívidas, intérminas. Sinto que a peste é pior do que a guerra, pois chega quieta e tira o sentido de orientação para qualquer defesa. A gente não sabe de onde vem o obus silencioso. A cidade mobilizou médicos, hospitais, enfermeiras. Os enterros povoam as ruas. Grandes coches fúnebres

16 Cf. Bertolli Filho 2003: 216. Bertolli Filho refrains from quoting the last sentence, comparing São Paulo with Rio de Janeiro, presumably because it was not really true. The statement shows, however, that pictures of carts in which uncovered corpses were loaded were circulating at the time (cf. also Bertucci 2004: 105). Duarte's retrospective description of the flu, from which he himself fell ill, conveys an impression of the life-world in 1918. He speaks of an "ano de calamidades", which culminated in the death (on December 28, 2018) of the Parnassian poet Olavo Bilac, whom he (and Andrade) admired (cf. Duarte 1976: 418-436). Among the "catastrophes", Duarte counts other serious illnesses in his family (diphtheria and scarlet fever) and the icy winter of June 2018, which destroyed a large part of the coffee production (1976: 406 and 412).

> atravancam o Centro. Inúmeros caixões desfilam pelos bairros (Andrade 1990 [1954]: 110).

Oswald de Andrade adds that he lost many friends and acquaintances to the flu (Andrade 1990 [1954]: 110). To ensure that burials could take place night and day, cemeteries were electrified (Bertolli Filho 2003: 217). Domestic seclusion alone seemed to offer security, but the view out the window into the street was terrifying:

> Foi no isolamento domiciliar que a cidade encontrou possibilidades de não se deixar vencer pela influenza. […] Como se sentiam essas pessoas que viam passar em frente de suas residências seguidos caminhões, bondes e carroças carregadas de urnas funerárias? (Bertolli Filho 2003: 259).

Against this historical background of the pandemic, my reading of *Pauliceia desvairada* begins with the secular oratorio "As enfibraturas do Ipiranga", which concludes the volume of poems and gives voice to the whole city and all its inhabitants in a gigantic performance. This will be followed by an examination of individual poems of the *Pauliceia* cycle and the "Prefácio interessantíssimo", and will close with a footnote on the author's enigmatic dedication of the work to himself.

3. Song of São Paulo – Together against Each Other into the Future?

The title of Andrade's secular oratorio*,* "As enfibraturas do Ipiranga"*,* alludes to the place where Brazil's independence was proclaimed in 1822. In the form of a libretto, the lyrical I or the author of the libretto imagines the performance of a tremendous musical event. It envisages the residents of the city singing together for one whole day, with the number of singers corresponding to the population of São Paulo around 1920. The course of the performance is regulated by numerous directions and instructions. Thus the 550,000 people are divided into four (social) groups, each forming a huge chorus, plus 5,000 musicians (PD: 52-53). The singers are grouped around the centrally located Vale do Anhangabaú and the extensive French park created there; they are performing on an urban stage space of gigantic proportions. With varying degrees of radicalism, the choruses bring to expression their respective aesthetic principles and preferences. The group of "Orientalismos convencionais" ("escritores e demais artífices elogiáveis", PD: 52) is placed on the terraces and in the premises of the venerable Teatro Municipal. Their singing is impressive, polyphonic, and multifaceted; they are accompanied by the orchestra situated on the terrace overlooking the garden. The "Senectudes tremulinas" of the aged millionaires and *haute bourgeoisie* ("milionários e burguêses"), singing exclusively in soprano, are placed in the palaces, hotels, town halls, and public buildings surrounding the valley. They orientate themselves unimaginatively to tradition

and the more impressive “Orientalismos convencionais”. The group of “Juvenilidades auriverdes” is described as the collective “we”; the lyric I evidently feels the greatest sympathy for, and perhaps the audience a special interest in, this group. The young chorus of tenors embodies artistic awakening; it stands for the invention of a new aesthetic and a future-oriented style, although the chorus will initially be defeated in the competition. The “green-gilt” youths are committed to the modernity of São Paulo and the cultural identity of Brazil. The singers stand firmly on the ground of the park, the city, and the nation. They use free verse and rhythms, striving to break with all forms and rules of tradition. They berate the high society in the Teatro Municipal and the palaces; the libretto even provides a blank space in which the “filthiest word known to the reader” can be entered (and sung along) (PD: 61).

This extremely theatrical part of *Pauliceia desvairada* has often caught the attention of literary critics: Vicky Unruh, for example, in her comparative study of the Latin American avant-garde, stresses the performative character of the oratorio libretto (Unruh 1994: 43-49) and treats in detail the various social groups, their statements and the corresponding instructions in the libretto. She refers to Benedito Nunes’s study of 1984, which under the telling title “Mário de Andrade: As enfibraturas do Modernismo” describes the *Pauliceia* in these words:

> *Pauliceia desvairada* é uma viagem lírica no espaço tenso e contraditório de São Paulo em via de transformar-se na grande cidade industrial sul-americana, onde o novo começa a sobrepujar o velho, onde gentes de várias nacionalidades misturam os seus falares, tal como se misturariam nos poemas, a história pessoal do poeta e a memória histórica do Tietê, o rio dos bandeirantes de há dois séculos atrás, que agora acompanhava largas avenidas asfaltadas, trilhos de elétricos (bondes) trepidantes e automóveis pagos com os lucros do café, enquanto em meio a um passado provinciano, de missas na Igreja de Sta. Cecília, de passeios nos parques, a antiga classe senhorial dos fazendeiros paulistas metamorfoseia-se, abandonando os seus antigos hábitos, em burguesia financiera (Nunes 1984: 65).

Nunes also emphasizes the complexity of the aesthetic and social constellations which are evident in the libretto and brought together in the joint performance. The oratorio is not only about a new aesthetic, but also about the image of a changing society in conflict. In 2015, Justin Read, following Unruh, returned to the monumental choral performance and describes it as a “totalizing allegory” of a city full of tension (Read 2015: 86).

The role of the solo soprano “Minha loucura”, who suddenly starts singing in the midst of the “Auriverdes” and sings the stormy youths to sleep under the starry Brazilian sky

after their great exertion for the coming times, has always been abundantly appreciated. Read sees this figure as a "cross-gendered […] fantasy of himself [the poet]" without any clear group affiliation (Read 2015: 82); so does Unruh (1994: 46-47), who also hears the poet's voice in this figure. Nunes emphasizes the closeness of "Minha loucura" to the young cultural nationalists, without completely identifying it with them (Nunes 1984: 74). For Willi Bolle, in a reading that evokes Walter Benjamin's vision of modernity, "Minha loucura" is the poet's allegorical guardian angel, who addresses the ambiguity of modernity: "razão e loucura andam de mãos dadas" (Bolle 1989: 23).

In the following, I shall be particularly interested in the fourth group of singers, the "Sandapilários indiferentes", which is overshadowed by the other groups and which interpretations usually treat only incidentally. This chorus of the workers and the poor ("operariado, gente pobre", PD: 52) is located on the Viaduto do Chá, that is, above the "Juvenilidades auriverdes" below in the park. Consisting of baritones and basses, the Sandapilários give voice only once: in a dark salvo, "num estampido preto" (PD: 54), they sing five lines of a song in which they express their indifference to the spectacle and complain about the disturbance of their sleep. Read sums up the usual characterization of the "Sandapilários indiferentes" as follows:

> The poor, working-class Sandpilários [!] Indiferentes are literally characterized as idiots. As Benedito Nunes has shown, "The noun *sandeu* ["idiot"], plus the verb *pilar* [to grind or crush], with the suffix -ário, gives the pejorative *Sandapilário* (those idiots who grind and regrind stupidities)." The disrespect is compounded by the fact that the Sandapilários are only given five lines of dialogue at the beginning of the piece, and remain dumb thereafter (Read 2015: 81).

For the quoted Nunes, the oratorio shows the ultimately "aristocratic character" and the "gratuidade antipopular" (Nunes 1984: 74) of the modernist movement of 1922, but he also points out that Andrade later distanced himself from this "intellectual aristocratic attitude" (Andrade 1972b [1942]: 236).

4. Dark Voices of Past Disasters

In this section, I question the traditional view that the "Sandapilários indiferentes" are notoriously indifferent to art, apathetic and ignorant, and propose a new interpretation of the chorus.

Who exactly are these "sandapilários"? In his poetological and manifesto-like "Prefácio interessantíssimo" (PD: 13-32), Andrade pointedly demonstrates how skilfully he employs various cultural registers and so a complex erudite or colloquial vocabulary: selected ancient names in a quotation (for example, the hetaera "Mnezarete", later

called “Phrynea”) are set next to technical terms of musicology that are converted for use in a poetological theory; reflections on the poetic language of the Parnassian poet Olavo Bilac, whom Andrade admired, are presented alongside explanations of colloquial forms of Brazilian Portuguese. Thus Andrade sometimes uses unusual, recondite words whose meaning is not immediately apparent, such as the term “sandapilário”, which the poet immediately translates and explains as “operariado, gente pobre” (PD: 52). But more detailed etymological and encyclopaedic research shows that the expression, far from meaning merely workers and poor people as such, means also “pallbearers” who carried the dead of the lower classes to cremation on a “sandapila” (bier) in ancient Rome. For instance, in John Lauris Blake’s popular American encyclopaedia, *The Parlor Book: Or, Family Encyclopaedia of Useful Knowledge and General Literature* (Blake 1837) we read this about the keyword “bier”:

> Biers, among the ancient Romans, were different according to the rank of the deceased. That whereon the poorer sort were carried, was called *sandapila*; that used for richer persons, *lectica*, *lectica funebris*, sometimes *lectus*. The former was only a wooden chest, *vilis arca*, which was burnt with the body, the latter was enriched and gilded. It was carried bare, or uncovered, when a person died a natural or easy death; when he was much disfigured or distorted, it was veiled or covered over (Blake 1837: 118).

In the German-language dictionary *Neues Real-Schullexicon enthaltend die zur Erklärung der alten Klassiker nothwendigen Hilfswissenschaften (Band 2)* of 1805, we find:

> Poor citizens and slaves were brought to the funeral pyre on a shoddy stretcher or in a coffin, called a *sandapila* […], or *vilis arca* […], or *orciniana sponda* […], usually borne by four bearers, called *vespillones* or *vespae*, because they carried the dead away around evening time (*vespertino tempore*) […], or *sandapilones, vel sandapilarii*, and were called *lecticarii* by later writers (Spark 1805: 573, author’s translation).

And an edition of the *Grande Enciclopédia Portuguesa e Brasileira* of the 1950s states:

> SANDÁPILA: s. f., Especie de maca ou tumba, em que os defuntos pobres eram levados à cova entre os Romanos (do lat. *sandapila*)
>
> SANDAPILÁRIO: s. m., Cada um dos individuos que conduziam a sandápila (do lat. *sandapilarius*) (Correia et al. 1957)

Whether Andrade consulted encyclopaedias, and which ones he consulted, or where else he came across the term, is difficult to say. But the realization that there are no indifferent masses of poor or even proletarian fools on the Viaduto do Chá, and instead

a chorus of pallbearers who were historically responsible for the burial of the lower classes and slaves, is of some relevance for the proposed new reading of Andrade's work in the context of the 1918 pandemic outlined at the beginning of this article. The short, dark salvo of the "Sandapilários indiferentes" thus takes on a new meaning: the baritones and basses are not merely reticent; their brief utterances are also intoned in the dark colours of death ("estampido preto").[17] Their conduct now seems intelligible. They have good reason to be "indifferent" to the musical spectacle early in the morning and to feel disturbed by the vocal competition, to refuse to listen to the stories, songs and rumours ("Vá de rumor! Vá de rumor!", PD: 54), and to be interested in neither the opera (here *Tosca*) nor the popular marches (here *Pé de Anjo*). The sandapilários need their rest ("Fóra! Fóra o que é de despertar!" PD: 54)! After a hard day, and night, at work, the pallbearers and undertakers are bone-tired and ready to drop.

From Bertolli Filho's and Bertucci's study we learn that in the first half of November 1918, at the height of the epidemic, between 200 and 300 people died in São Paulo every day. Funerals took place day and night. Because of the enormous number of deaths, the city administration urgently needed more gravediggers. But the risk of infection that emanated from the dead, and the rumours of irregularities and objectionable practices in the cemeteries, made the search difficult:

> Não só a crença de que o risco de contágio era maior para aqueles que lidavam com os defuntos, como também os successivos boatos que falavam sobre a ocorrência de acontecimentos escabrosos nas necrópoles da cidade determinavam a escassez de mão-de-obra disposta a trabalhar na abertura de covas e no sepultamento das vítimas da influenza (Bertolli Filho 2003: 146).

Although the wages of the workers were increased four- to fivefold, there was still a shortage of labour, so that employees and workers were hired and recruited from other positions in the city administration and from private companies (Bertolli Filho 2003: 146-152). In spite of the increased public budget, the large number of funerals that had to take place as quickly as possible presented a major challenge, which the city administration and residents were hardly able to cope with (cf. also Bertucci 2004: 302). These extreme collective experiences, according to Bertolli Filho, remained inscribed in people's memories and bodies – in, according to Andrade, the very fibres ("enfibraturas") of the urban corpus.[18] In his libretto, however, Andrade shows that the

17 Bolle interestingly remarks: "A grande massa da população, os sandapilários indiferentes, os pobres *que indiferentemente cavam o próprio* túmulo; na peleja que vai começar, eles defendem posições convencionais e logo mais se desinteressam" (Bolle 1989: 17, author's emphasis).

18 This inscription affects in fact not only the memory of the survivors but also the immunological memory of the body. Bertolli Filho mentions a study on antibodies in the São Paulo population that detected immunological cross-reactions between the 2009 H1N1 flu and the pandemic of 1918 (Bertolli Filho 2003: 360, footnote 11).

majority of the population suppressed this, while the most immediate witnesses of the event lack the strength to give it voice. All this explains the curt and gruff appearance of the exhausted pallbearers and their indifference to the artistic goings-on.

5. *Pauliceia Desvairada*: Picture Puzzles in a Delirium

In her detailed review of Cláudio Bertolli Filho's study, the social historian Christiane Maria Cruz de Souza interestingly employs the telling title "As dimensões político-sociais de uma epidemia: a pauliceia desvairada pela gripe espanhola" (2005), though the article does not use the quotation from Andrade again. The intertextual allusion, however, is more than plausible. For Andrade's pioneering contribution to the modernist awakening seems almost mimetically to take up and incorporate that febrile delirium which struck terror into the heart of the city between October and December 1918.

A budding avant-garde poet and musicologist, Andrade had embarked here upon a radical venture: he was attempting to use completely new aesthetic means to make the personal and collective traumatic experience of the pandemic *implicitly* tangible in the form of a city portrait – in marked contrast to his earlier poems that *explicitly* reflect the World War. [19] To this end, he invokes an amalgam of futuristic positions, Émile Verhaeren's impressive symbolist imagery, Paul Dermée's poetics, and many other sources that he lists in the preface and ultimately combines with his own poetics, derived from musical rules and structures. The texts of *Pauliceia desvairada* unfold a dazzling modern city of trade and traffic, the arts, architecture, park landscapes and masses of people circulating in urban space. But in this urban body, which gradually takes shape poetically, the deadly disease is lurking. That Andrade refrains from explicitly referring to this historical reality in later explanations of the work's genesis may owe to the fact that an admission of such a connection would ultimately render his highly experimental, hallucinatory and anti-mimetic reinvention of São Paulo recognisable and explicable as a *realistic* text, namely as a poetic imitation of a fever dream.[20] Paradoxically, at least at first glance, he is thus contributing to the very pact of silence that settled over

19 The cycle of poems entitled *Há uma gota de sangue em cada poema* of 1917, which evinces Andrade's empathy for the victims and suffering of the First World War. Because of their traditional style, these poems were soon considered to be pre-modernist early works or "obra imatura" (Andrade 1960 [1917]).

20 His work might then have been stamped as *pathological* and not taken seriously. That today exactly this connection between illness and literature is of particular interest has been shown by Catherine Belling (2014), who points to the literary singularity of Katherine Anne Porter's influenza novel *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (1939), which treats Porter's experience of illness during the 1918 flu. The aim of my research is to investigate such repercussions in texts of the avant-garde movements, even if they are formulated far less explicitly than in Porter's novella, whose title was the inspiration for Laura Spinney's study.

the collective social experience of the deadly flu.[21] This seems to be corroborated by a much-quoted, particularly iconoclastic paragraph in the "Prefácio interessantíssimo":

> Mas todo êste prefácio, com todo o disparate das teorias que contém, não vale coisíssima nenhuma. Quando escrevi *Paulicea desvairada* não pensei em nada disto. Garanto porém que chorei, que cantei, que ri, que berrei… Eu vivo! (PD: 31)

So instead of the supposedly avant-garde gesture of negation and destruction – even of the very poetics which Andrade develops here! – this statement is perhaps actually about his own life and survival in harrowing times. The semantic tension between remembering and silence, between referentiality and a decidedly anti-mimetic aesthetic, would thus explain the peculiar tension between the clearly futuristic impulse driving *Pauliceia* and that tone of melancholy common to many of the poems (e.g., "O trovador", "Tristura"). The melancholy can also be felt in the accompanying drawing by Antonio [García] Moya, which shows a lunar landscape reminiscent of de Chirico, with a single, lonely statue in a park. [22]

My further consideration now of the poems from the *Pauliceia desvairada* corpus will also sound out echoes of the traumatic event of the city suffering under the flu. A comprehensive analysis of all poems, however, is beyond the scope of this article.

In the second poem, "O trovador", the singer, the lyrical self, the harlequin,[23] narrator and rhapsodist, who also reveals himself as a "lute-beating Tupí", already appear as a melancholic. "Sick in his soul", he remembers with a chill ("um frio") a stricken person: "Outras vezes é um doente, um frio na minha alma doente […]"; he speaks of sarcasm and bitterness, but still wants to sing about the things of this world and the modern city of São Paulo, and therefore begins with a dramatic onomatopoeia: "Dlorum" (PD: 33).

The following poem, "Os cortejos" (PD: 33), then leads into the midst of the plague, and this positioning right at the beginning of the poetic series is presumably no coincidence. The sudden, surprising negativity of this poem ("horríveis as cidades!") is striking and is usually interpreted as the downside of a modernization process between promises for the future and barbarism. The "cortejos" are accordingly often read as the movements or processions of anonymous crowds. Justin Read thus sees them devoured by the urban Moloch ("grande boca de mil dentes"): São Paulo reveals itself to be a "cannibal

21 In a letter of 3 July 1922 from Manuel Bandeira to Andrade, e.g., a memory of the flu peeks out in a short aside when Bandeira apologises for his delayed reply: "Uma gripe espanholizante impediu-me, até agora, de responder à sua deliciosa carta do mês passado" (Andrade and Bandeira 2000: 65).

22 The drawing appears in the original edition between the "Prefácio interessantíssimo" and the cycle of "Pauliceia" poems.

23 See "Arlequim e modernidade" (Lopez 1996: 17-35) and Fonseca 2012, for whom the harlequin serves as a leitmotif in a broad sense.

city" seizing its proletariat (Read 2015: 90). Fonseca too sees a peculiar paradox in this poem:

> Nesse poema-desabafo, o pessimismo e a ironia são flagrantes e a generalização das afirmativas faz pensar. Talvez, as cidades, em geral, seriam horríveis porque, com as transformações modernizantes, os indivíduos perdem parte de suas referências pessoais já sedimentadas, que antes garantiam a proximidade entre o ser e o estar no mundo (Fonseca 2012: 87).

Yet for all the ambivalence of these images owing to modernization, they have a further downside, which suddenly emerges through a change of image or Wittgensteinian "change of aspect". All at once, the "cortejos" are now recognizable as funeral processions. On the retina of the city observer they are reflected as the monotonous movement of carts (rolling to cemeteries): "Monotonia das minhas retinas… / […] Horríveis as cidades! / […] Nada de asas! Nada de poesia! Nada de alegria! / Oh! os tumultuários das auséncias! / Paulicea - a grande boca de mil dentes" (PD: 33). This is about absences that cause tumult; he sees purulent wounds ("os jôrros […] de pús e de mais pús"), whirling, short, feeble, skinny people ("Giram homens fracos, baixos, magros …"), serpentines (streamers or winding sheets?) unfurling ("serpentinas de entes frementes a se desenrolar"). These people are in the end "ape-like", the poet-observer concludes in the last lines: "Estes homens de São Paulo, todos iguais e desiguais, quando vivem dentro dos meus olhos tão ricos, parecem-me uns macacos, uns macacos" (PD: 33). The sudden realisation contained in this perception, which switches, like a flipped image, is that these verses and images can also refer to dead bodies (which are devoured by mass graves), and this seems to be confirmed when we read Bertolli Filho's historical account. The photo accompanying his descriptions shows trams laden with stacks of coffins:

> Como se sentiam os homens e as mulheres do período ao se depararem com bondes da Light ou caminhões contratados pela Prefeitura transitando funebremente pelas ruas, recolhendo os doentes e os mortos ou transportando um carregamento de caixões destinados ou já ocupados pelas vítimas da influenza? (Bertolli Filho 2003: 307)

Even more drastically, Bertucci reconstructs the following, similar scenes from reports in the contemporary press:

> Em uma carroça, sentado sobre caixões que deveriam ser enterrados no Cemitério da Penha, um enfermeiro, indiferente aos olhares assustados das pessoas, caçoava dos transeuntes que encontrava pelo caminho (Bertucci 2004: 107).

Against this backdrop, the poem “O Rebanho” reads like a mocking, even sarcastic commentary, spoken in a feverish delirium, on the politicians who pretend to be ever vigilant in caring for the well-being of the city even in times of plague: “Oh! minhas alucinações! / […] Como um possesso num acesso em meus aplausos / aos salvadores do meu estado amado…” (PD: 35) Here, too, a glance at Bertolli Filho’s and Bertucci’s studies shows that, despite the numerous measures taken by the municipal government, helplessness and disorientation intermittently reigned in the city, contradicting the official discourse about the manageability of the epidemic (cf., e.g., Bertucci 2004: 302).

In “Ode ao burguês”, too, the famous diatribe against the city residents, which on the surface corresponds perfectly to the radical gesture of *épater le bourgeois*, there seem to be allusions to the state of emergency caused by the epidemic. For example, in his historical study, Bertolli Filho documents in several places that the influenza virus was an “undemocratic” contagion and thus opposes contrary discourses to the effect that the disease afflicted everyone regardless of social class.[24] Thus we can read the poetic diatribe as an outburst of anger and reproach towards those inhabitants of the city who have the privilege of hiding within their four walls (“que vivem dentro de muros sem pulos”, PD: 38). The poem hints at the social inequality that continues to deepen in times of pandemic. “Todos iguais e desiguais”, declares the poem “Os cortejos” (PD: 33). The privileged citizens are greeted with “Mas nós morremos de fome” (PD: 38), while the owners of the coffee plantations, which represent the wealth of the São Paulo elites, flee to their estates: “Fogem os fazendeiros para o lar!” (PD: 51). This last verse belongs to the fourth and last landscape picture of the *Pauliceia* (“Paisagem n. 4”), in which the effects of the crisis are also described in terms of the decline of the coffee economy, financial threats and collapse: “Mas as ventaneiras da desilusão! a baixa do café!… As quebras, as ameaças, as audácias superfinas!…”. [25]

In the poem “Nocturno”, the lyrical self wanders through the city at night. The picture of the sparking trams is repeated thrice: they pass like an expectoration, “wounding” and “spitting out” the white-washed gloom, a harlequinesque chiaroscuro. The poem conveys a cascade of impressions from a hot (feverish) night; it speaks of crime, lasciviousness, flying devils, succubi (“corpos de nuas carregando”, PD: 45) and other

24 See footnote 13. A corresponding statement can be found, e.g., in Paulo Duarte, who, however, introduces a qualification: “As baixas entre conhecidos e gente mais importante são numerosas também, a epidemia não respeita nem classes nem situações, atinge indiferentemente ricos e pobres, mais os pobres por causa evidentemente da vida com menos higiene e menos conforto que levam” (Duarte 1976: 425).

25 With its reference to the decline in coffee production, this verse contains a further allusion to the year 1918 in which, according to Duarte, half (cf. footnote 15), and according to Pompeu de Toledo (2015: 179), eighty per cent of the coffee harvest was destroyed due to an extraordinary frost period in June. The same year also saw a plague of locusts.

images between dream and nightmare. The song “Quando eu morrer” is simultaneously played on a guitar, and it seems that the singer (or the guitar? or the heavy scent of vanilla) falters and falls to the ground a little later (PD: 44).

Again and again the poems speak of being alone: “Tristura” is about the lonely love for the city of São Paulo: “Paulicea, minha noiva… Ha matrimónios assim… Ninguém os assistirá nos jamais! As permanências de ser um na febre! Nunca nos encontrámos…” (PD: 39). In the last poem, “Paisagem n. 4”, a combative tone predominates; it is about São Paulo (“Oh! Êste orgulho máximo de ser paulistamente!!!’, PD: 52), and in this confession resonates the conviction that, together, all who are now alone could triumph (“A victoria de todos os sòzinhos!”, PD: 51).

My reading of *Pauliceia desvairada* has confined itself to an initial search for flip images and passed over many other aspects – for instance, the poetics of the harlequinesque, numerous allusions to the modern city of the coffee economy and urban labour, intertextual and intermedia dialogues with music, art, architecture, literature and popular culture from the past and present of Brazil and beyond. The main purpose of this reading is to show that Andrade’s aesthetic experiment, in addition to striving for a contemporary, innovative aesthetic, was the response to an existential experience: namely the collective traumatic experience of a city in the grip of a deadly fever, in standstill, under conditions of the anxious retreat and isolation of its inhabitants in the face of innumerable sick and dead and overburdened urban infrastructures. The poet omits any explicit reference to these historical events, but after the publication of the work he emphatically insisted on the singularity of his *Pauliceia desvairada* and that it cannot be compared to the modernist texts of his contemporaries.[26]

In 1918, the year of the flu, Andrade, as already mentioned, was active as a music critic for the newspaper *A Gazeta*. Based on his almost daily reviews during the annual opera season at the Teatro Municipal, we can trace the dramatic collapse of cultural life brought about by the flu. On 23 October 1918, after the audience had steadily decreased and more and more singers became ill and could not adequately be replaced, he emphatically pleaded for the season to be terminated:

> As representações precisam de ser suspensas, para que o teatro não apresente a deplorável feição que ontem apresentava. Os artistas coitados, sente-se que

26 Cf. Andrade’s review of *O Homem e a Morte* (1922) by Menotti del Picchia in the modernist magazine *Klaxon*. It refers to the following other publications: Oswald de Andrade’s *Os condenados*, Ronald de Carvalho’s *Epigramas irônicos e sentimentais*, Menotti del Picchia’s *O Homem e a Morte*, and Guilherme de Almeida’s *As canções gregas*. Andrade describes these texts as literary “meteors”, from which he distinguishes his own work: “*Paulicea* […] tem um aspecto tão especial, tão desvairado, tão extra, que não pode ter um efeito plausível numa renovação. Seu caracter selvagem, orgulhosamente pessoal tira-lhe essa expressão de humanidade, de coisa universal, cósmica, que permite desenvolvimento, assimilação. É uma obra à parte” (Andrade 1922/1923: 27).

> estão deprimidos, deslocados, abatidos por uma atmósfera de apreensão, que os impede de bem representar. A orchestra, reduzida a um mínimo de 35 músicos, regida por um substituto, coros incertos… um desastre, pouco aliável à pompa dos ouros e mármores do nosso teatro (quoted in Sato 2016: 198).

In the months following the end of the flu, Andrade occupied himself intensely with the art and architecture of the Baroque; after a trip to the Baroque region of Minas Gerais in June 1919, he wrote four chronicles entitled "A Arte Religiosa no Brasil".[27] He was particularly interested in the creative "genius" of the autodidact sculptor Antônio Francisco Lisboa, known as Aleijadinho, which seemed to him well-nigh paradoxical in view of the artist's living conditions. Around the same time, he also wrote several chronicles about the city of São Paulo.[28] These texts contain no mention of the fact that the city had just recovered from the plague. Just as public discourse had suppressed the flu, so too Andrade ignores it in his chronicles. All the more striking, therefore, that only a short time later the *sandapilários* in "As enfibraturas do Ipiranga" will call to mind those pallbearers and gravediggers who proclaim their exhaustion and complete indifference to the noisy urban singing spectacle. They alone embody the memory of the traumatic event, left unaddressed by any of the other singers. Their brief outburst and subsequent silence point to the epidemic and death.[29] Here begins the trail of Andrade's project of poetic remembrance.

The deliberate ambiguity of his approach is particularly easy to understand in the already described "Os cortejos". The poem works like a Baroque picture puzzle: where we at first imagine the scenery of a dynamic, vital, even cannibalistically encroaching city of commercial and industrial modernity, our perception then suddenly flips into another image as soon as we read the poem against the backdrop of the "epidemic" experience. The monotonous passing of vehicles or processions, reflected in the eye of the beholder, reveals itself as the last journey of the dead borne on carts and trams through the streets of the city to the graveyards. If we follow the clues laid by these sudden changes of image, we will discover further "vanitas" motifs that point to finitude: the observer's retina is a mirror revealing the tedious routine and vanity of the world. In this city of vanities ("vaidades e mais vaidades", PD: 33), the observing eye no longer reflects people but rather monkeys, which in Baroque emblematics were also considered symbols of vanity. The poem likewise contains the hint that, in the face of

27 The series was published between January and June 2020 in the *Revista do Brasil* (cf. Avancini 1994: 48-49, footnote 2).

28 The chronicles appeared between November 1920 and May 1921 in the journal *Ilustração Brasileira*. They were republished and commented on by Telê Ancona Lopez in 2004 (Lopez 2004); see also Lopez 2013.

29 Manuel Bandeira accuses Andrade of a "desvairismo *gongórico*", a reproach that in my opinion intuitively identifies the point of the Baroque trompe-l'œil illusion, but fails to grasp its part in the whole (letter of October 3, 1922, Andrade and Bandeira 2000: 69).

death, we are all equal, even if we die in unequal circumstances: hence the paradoxical formulation “todos iguais e desiguais” (PD: 33). The second verse, “Serpentinas de entes frementes a se desenrolar” (PD: 33), marked by several internal rhymes and repeated shortly before the end of the poem, also attracts our attention. This unusual movement image alludes perhaps to the special style of the *figura serpentinata* in Mannerist painting and sculpture (for example, El Greco). In his epochal study of Mannerist art, the art historian Jacques Bousquet points to the particular dynamism of this form of expression and draws an interesting analogy to Futurism:

> If we apply a […] comparison, then the predilection for the *figura serpentinata* corresponds to a concern similar to “Futurism”. With their spirally twisting bodies and their dangerously unstable equilibrium, a number of Mannerist figures yet hold back their movement, the present form preparing and demanding the future form (Bousquet 1985: 84, author’s translation from the German edition).

Here I should like to recall the well-known picture puzzles of Charles Allan Gilbert, whose drawings and caricatures (often expressive phantasmagoria) were published in the popular *Life Magazine*, and which were probably not unknown in Brazil at the beginning of the twentieth century. Flip images like *All Is Vanity* (1892) take up Baroque traditions (for example, Arcimboldo’s art); they were later especially valued by the Surrealists.[30] Andrade transfers such double images or phantasmagoria to the urban space of São Paulo. Sometimes he names them explicitly – for example, in the poem “Anhangabaú” – in which he evokes the historical landscape of the river valley *under* the parks redesigned in the French style. For this purpose he brings to view (using a line of verse from Manuel Bandeira’s poem “Os sapos” [1918]) the dynamics of the flip image: “‘Meu pai foi rei!/ – Foi. – Não foi. – Foi. – Não foi’” (PD: 42). Four lines later he again draws attention to the mode of double reading or seeing when he speaks of the palimpsest, that is, the process of writing over a primary script that is then hidden: “Meu querido palimpsesto sem valor!” (PD: 42).

6. *Memento Mori* – Remembrance of the Dead: An Aesthetic Challenge

So what exactly is reflected on the retina of the *Pauliceia* observer? What does this sudden second (or double) look at the modern city reveal, a city that is still carrying the deadly epidemic in its bones (or “fibres”)? And what does this peculiar structure of perception bring about?

30 The catalogue for the exhibition *Effetto Arcimboldo. Transformazioni del volto nel sedicesimo e nel ventesimo seculo* (1987) provides an excellent illustration of these connections. But here I must abstain from further remarks on Surrealism.

My interpretations of the highly experimental cycle of poems presented here would hardly be conceivable without a return to historical experience and without the historiographic view, which recalls the long repressed social history of that panicked world in the state of emergency during the Spanish flu. Bearing in mind our collective experience of the current 2020 pandemic, one hundred years after the Spanish flu, knowledge of these historical studies contributes significantly to a sudden switch of perception when reading Andrade's famous avant-garde poetic text. Ludwig Wittgenstein was particularly interested in the productivity of the phenomenon of "aspect change", which he describes in the *Philosophical Investigations* as follows: "The expression of a change of aspect is an expression of a *new* perception and, at the same time, an expression of an unchanged perception" (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953]: 206e). For Wittgenstein it is important that this visual experience can change ways of seeing by making us suddenly see something that was not seen before. The literary scholar and linguist Chris Bezzel points out that Wittgenstein's considerations are not limited to the narrower field of the optical:

> Insofar as poetry is based on the staged experience of the meaning of words, even of language itself, it practices the permanent change of aspect […]. Wittgenstein repeatedly stages linguistic-poetic duck-rabbit-heads; he always leads us to see everything differently, everything anew – for instance, language as an ancient city or a philosophical problem as a ball of thread (Bezzel 2013: 120).[31]

In an essay on Arcimboldo's picture puzzle art, Roland Barthes also devotes his reflections to the fascination of the flip image: "The identity of the two objects rests not on the simultaneity of perception, but on the rotation of the image, which is presented as reversible" (Barthes 1990: 137).[32] Here what seems to me especially important is Barthes's reference to the context in which such oscillating perceptions take place: "The context alone limits the statement; the imagination, on the other hand, is infinite, and capable of such masterly acrobatics that one feels it is ready to seize all objects" (Barthes 1990: 146). Andrade's *Pauliceia* is in fact about a complex textual genesis in a concrete historical context of experience: the poet wanted to capture the abundance of urban life after the epidemic and its memory, and sought a suitable contemporary language for this. He wanted to capture the energy of the recovering but still fragile body in which the disease, in the form of a precarious immunization, and thus also of finitude (as the remembrance of death), is inscribed. The double look at the flip-image poems

31 Bezzel refers to Wittgenstein's well-known drawing of a flip image in which both a duck's head and a rabbit's head can be seen. Wittgenstein called this the "duck-rabbit" (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953]: 204e).

32 This and following quotation are translated from the German edition.

of *Pauliceia desvairada* therefore leads us to realise that the undisguised melancholy of the modernist observer of São Paulo is based on a *memento mori*.

As already noted, Andrade refuses to give an explicit explanation of his flip image aesthetics, even when he reflects on his aesthetic principles, that is, in the "Prefácio interessantíssimo". He refrains from presenting the historical reference because he desires not to *name* the outrageous but rather to *stage* it in fresh, radical language. "Não sou futurista (de Marinetti)", Andrade writes in the "Prefácio" (PD: 16), and he invariably insisted on this difference. How in fact could he be a Futurist in the Italian sense? Marinetti's aggressive contempt for death[33] stands in complete opposition to the view of the art and music lover interested in the Baroque era (who actively professed his allegiance to Catholicism): "Sou passadista, confesso" (PD: 14), he says at the beginning of the preface. Nevertheless, he admits that Marinetti gave him a decisive impetus for the linguistic renewal of his own work, because in theory and practice Marinetti invoked the "liberation" of words from the corset of linguistic conventions (cf. PD: 22). Then Andrade presents his innovative notation based on the principles of musical "harmonics", which he contrasts with a traditional "melodic" notation. In his exposition of the idea, harmonics is associated with verticality, simultaneity and polyphony; numerous advocates of similar procedures such as Paul Dermée, Apollinaire and, to some extent, the Parnassian poet Olavo Bilac are cited as sources. Andrade turns away from melodic language, based on chronological sequence and the rules of grammar and linearity (PD: 22-26).

The tension between Andrade's insistence on "passadismo" and his linguistic self-empowerment, which is reflected in detail in the preface (and staged in the following poems), makes me suspect that ultimately the "Prefácio interessantíssimo" also follows the logic of the flip image. Andrade even seems to want to explain this when he emphasizes two levels of meaning in his poetry and, incidentally, seems to refer to the dead:

> Escrever arte moderna não significa jamais para mim representar a vida actual no que tem de exterior: automóveis, cinema, asfalto. Si estas palavras frequentam-me o livro não é porquê pense com elas escrever moderno, mas porquê sendo meu livro moderno, elas têm nele sua razão de ser. […] Reconheço mais a existéncia de temas eternos, passíveis de afeiçoar pela modernidade: universo, pátria, amor e a presença-dos-ausentes [!], ex-gôso-amargo-de-infelizes (PD: 28-29).

33 Here I cite only the relevant passage from the 1909 *Futurist Manifesto*: "Noi vogliamo glorificare la guerra – sola igiene del mondo – il militarismo, il patriotismo, il gesto distruttore dei libertari, le belle idee per cui si muore e il disprezzo della donna" (Marinetti 1968 [1909]: 10). In his novel *Mafarka, il futurista* (1909), Marinetti expresses contempt for death even more drastically and in a colonial, racist setting.

In this sense, a statement previously quoted is pertinent again here: the author ultimately crosses out *all* his previous poetological explanations and confessions as irrelevant – perhaps as "vain" in the Baroque sense – in order to point to a simple *other* truth, that of life (and survival):

> Mas todo êste prefácio, com todo o disparate das teorias que contém, não vale coisíssima nenhuma. Quando escrevi "Paulicéia desvairada" não pensei em nada disto. Garanto porém que chorei, que cantei, que ri, que berrei… Eu vivo! (PD: 31)

A little later he further writes: "Repugna-me dar a chave de meu livro. Quem fôr como eu tem essa chave" (PD: 31). Andrade prefers not to explain his poetic picture puzzle because he is seeking to *induce an intuition* of an almost Baroque *memento mori* in a new, experimental language.[34] The collective experience of the deadly disease and its importance for the whole city is intended to reappear in the contemporary language of modernism and in this way become productive. "O passado é lição para se meditar, não para reproduzir", the poet says, and immediately afterwards he refers to Dante's (necessary) descent to the dead, in spite of all warnings: "E tu che sè costí, anima viva, pártiti da cotesti che son morti" (PD: 29). In epidemiological terms, Mário de Andrade's early avant-garde work might be described as a "double vaccination": it sensitizes readers to the need for a new language, and it helps to immunize them against forgetting a social catastrophe.

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34 A concluding consideration on the unusual dedication that Andrade addressed to Mário de Andrade, called "Mestre querido" (cf. PD: 11): once again, this seems to repeat the structure of a flip image in the double figure of the poet as master and student, here taking the interesting form of speculation about the freedom of art to create within a (religious) belief system. The key to this unusual dedication probably lies in the evocation of Pope Adrian VI (1459-1523), who initiated difficult reform processes within the church in the early years of the Reformation and actively faced the challenges posed by historical and religious upheavals.

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